

4105  $\frac{b}{f}$

CONSIDERATIONS  
ON THE  
PROPRIETY  
OF REQUIRING A  
SUBSCRIPTION to ARTICLES of FAITH

[Price One Shilling and Sixpence.]

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPERTY

OF THE ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Small text at the bottom of the page, likely a printer's mark or a small title]

SU

Printed by

T

Printed

Fl

Pa



3

# CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPRIETY

OF REQUIRING A

SUBSCRIPTION to ARTICLES of FAITH.

*By J. Edm. Law, Bishop of Carlisle,  
& Master of St. Peter's college, Cambridge.*

The SECOND EDITION, corrected and enlarged.

---

LONDON:

Printed for J. ROBSON, in New Bond-street; B. WHITE, in  
Fleet-street; T. CADELL, in the Strand; J. WILKIE, in St.  
Paul's Church-Yard; and T. & J. MERRILL, in Cambridge.

MDCCLXXIV.

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPERTY

OF REQUIRING A

SUBSCRIPTION TO ARTICLES OF FAITH.

THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED AND ENLARGED.



LONDON:

Printed for J. Robinson, 10, New Bond Street; R. Warren, in  
Fleet Street; T. Cadogan, in the Strand; J. Walker, in St.  
Paul's Church-Yard; and T. & A. Agnew, in Cambridge.

48  
4  
10/11

---

# CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPRIETY

OF REQUIRING A

SUBSCRIPTION TO ARTICLES OF FAITH.

ON a calm, and, as I trust, impartial view of the Controversy about Subscriptions, which has subsisted so long, and been supported with so much zeal; it appeared to me that several able writers, who had engaged in this cause, were even yet hardly got in sight of the main Question, concerning the true grounds of civil and ecclesiastical Polity; and that the whole might be set in a better light, by reviving and enforcing some of those original maxims which ought

B

to

to direct all such enquiries ; but which in my apprehension have long been, and are still, either too little understood, or too much disregarded.

I have no design here of entering into the subject matter of our Articles; but shall only beg leave to propose some general Observations, concerning the rise and progress of a custom, which seems to place certain explications of supposed Scripture Doctrines on the same foot with the Scriptures themselves;—to enquire how far this practice may be just and expedient in the present times, or in itself defensible at any time;—to see upon what principles it is founded;—what pleas are offered to support it;—and lastly, point out some of its effects.

The Christian Religion, as originally constituted, was very plain and practical; level to all capacities, and calculated for the common good of mankind, in every station and condition, both here and hereafter.

But in process of time, when converts flocked into the church from each Jewish sect



sect and Gentile school of philosophy, and brought their characteristic dogmata along with them, this divine institution swerving from the simplicity of a moral discipline to the subtilties of metaphysical debate, grew into a most ingenious system of speculative science; men of art and intrigue sought to distinguish themselves, by introducing some peculiarities of their own party into it; and on its gaining an establishment in the world, strove to get these established along with it, in some elaborate creed or confession; the more involved and intricate the better, since the sacred peculium was thereby secured in fewer hands; and these refinements, being once imposed, were the more readily received and propagated; as there was apprehended to be no small *merit*, certainly appeared to be a considerable *benefit*, in believing, or [which served the purpose equally] professing to believe, and promising to maintain them\*.

Thus

\* Setting aside such partial, indirect views, it must upon the least reflection be acknowledged, that a

Thus each successive age went on crying up, and contributing its share to the bulky code of such abstruse *credenda*; and in proportion to its zeal for these, slighting

*Creed* ought to be very clear and intelligible to all persons; consisting of the most essential points wherein all parties are agreed, and into which school terms and subtilties of disputation should never be admitted.

The terms of *Christian Communion* should likewise be very general and comprehensive, and abstruse controverted doctrines discharged as far as it is possible, from public forms of devotion.

By these means a Liturgy might easily be framed, wherein all sects of Christians might join, and prove perhaps the best means of promoting mutual peace and harmony amongst us; while after the good example of some less eminent, though perhaps not less perfect, Churches, we manifest ourselves to be really members of, what we daily profess a belief in, the *Holy Catholic Church*; and preserve, as far as in us lieth, the *Communion of Saints*; and thereby give no unimportant sense to these two articles of our Creed, thus standing in close connection with each other, and the former of them very properly inferring the latter: which it plainly does, both as implying an obligation, and as including a privilege. Since if christian communion and social worship be a christian man's duty, they must also be his right: and if we are forbidden to *forsake the assembling of ourselves*

ing the proper grounds and objects of a rational faith, and detracting from the importance, and discrediting the practice of each christian virtue,

And

*ourselves together*, how can we answer for the obstructing of it in others, and keeping them at an unnecessary distance from us, by needless impositions ?

Dogmata creditu necessaria sunt paucissima, intra breve *Apostolorum Symbolum* contenta, cujus professio in Liturgiis unice a baptizando requiritur, et ab Ecclesia *Basiliensi* in administratione sacrae coenae repetitur, hoc addito Epiphonemate: *His Articulis, Fratres, sinus contenti, nec quenquam qui hoc credit temere damnemus.* *Weissen*, N. T. Vol. II. p. 874. de Interpr.

But as the present age, how much soever improved in religious knowledge, seems yet far from entertaining such a liberal plan ; most people, instead of looking into the true nature and design of Christianity, as delivered in its original records, and pursued in the more primitive times, being still apt to view it in a systematic way, as consisting of various doctrinal points, drawn from different sources of philosophy, whether ancient or modern ;—This being in a great measure still the case, we must, I fear, submit to prejudices ; and instead of amusing ourselves with visionary schemes of perfection, it may perhaps be sufficient here to throw out a few hints,

And thus every age grew worse and worse ; till things coming to a crisis, on the hints, of a more practicable kind, by suggesting some relaxation from the present mode of assent ; which entails a *whole* system on us at once ; as will appear upon the slightest inspection.

For though these same Articles are called only Thirty-nine, yet no man must from hence imagine, that he has only thirty-nine Propositions to deal with ; he will find four or five times that number, though bound up indeed into so many bundles. The second Article alone contains thirteen very substantial propositions ; the seventeenth, twelve ; the twenty-fifth as many. How many are included in the thirty-fifth 'tis impossible to say, as it implies our assent to two whole Books, one of which is now scarcely extant, and the other appears to want considerable elucidations, before it can be rightly *understanded of the People*.

Now may it not well be questioned, whether in any one science or subject, such a multitude of propositions can be found, beyond absolute intuition or demonstration, wherein even twelve men, much less where twelve thousand, and a perpetual succession of them, through every vicissitude of learning and knowledge, can be made to accord consistently and uniformly ?

Concerning these in general it may be sufficient to observe, that they either deliver doctrines in which all men are agreed, and so far must be superfluous ; or handle points about which many serious men still doubt and dispute ; and so fall within the subsequent Considerations.



the revival of Letters, this enormous mass of corruption was laid open, and some Reformation called for in so loud a manner, that the conductors of these political machines were no longer able to suppress the call, or stifle it.

They who renounced some gross errors of the *Romish* church, set out upon these two solid and self-evident principles :

First, that the holy Scripture is our *only standard* both of faith and practice :

And secondly, that its meaning is to be ascertained to us by *our own reason* on the whole.

Now according to these principles, the nature and extent of every man's religious persuasion in points of faith, must be a thing purely personal, transacted only between God and his own conscience; there being no third person commissioned to determine it for him; no sect or society on earth, how respectable soever, upon whose authority he can absolutely depend, and which may be securely pleaded as sufficient to justify him in such dependence; nor consequently  
which

which has a right to control his determinations in this respect. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Why dost thou then judge thy brother, and set at nought thy brother, seeing every one of us shall give account of himself to God?*

If then, in this case every man must answer for himself, is it not fit and equitable that he be allowed, and invited to judge for himself? Under such circumstances may not each individual, who has common sense, proceed according to the measure and proportion of it? (and if he has not, what good will his religion do him?) Ought not every one, that can be termed a reasonable creature, to make use of his reason, most especially in matters of the last importance, and follow its directions to the utmost of his capacity, be it ever so small?—and when we have just ideas of Christianity, we shall see that no very great one is required for the purpose:—Must he not *set up* his *private judgment*, and abide by it, in all articles of belief which concern his eternal welfare;

fare; so long as ever he apprehends them to be such; so long as he continues sensible that he has a soul of his own to be saved, and that by the *honest* or sincere application of those abilities that God has given him [which is all the *merit* I know in believing] he must faithfully approve himself to the same God, and diligently work out his own salvation?

The pious protestants above mentioned, though fully satisfied both of the truth and the importance of these principles, on which they had hitherto proceeded, yet aware how greatly they were misrepresented and abused on that account; began to think it necessary to repel the various calumnies that had been cast upon them, by setting forth some public *Constitutions* or *Confessions*, as a declaration both of their faith and worship; and to make such declaration still more authentic, they likewise engaged themselves in a mutual bond of *conformity* to all these *Constitutions*.—

But here these good men were not equally aware, how little agreeable this last part of their conduct might prove to

the principles pursued by them in the former; or rather how greatly it would contribute to the *building up again* that spiritual Tyranny, which they had so long laboured to *destroy*: nor did they imagine in how short a time this Bulwark, raised for their safeguard and defence against the common Foe, was to become a *wall of separation*, which would divide them from each other; a *root of bitterness* amongst them, *whereby many* would be *troubled and defiled*; in short, one of the chief causes of their mutual distraction and desolation.

This appears to have been the case more or less in all protestant countries throughout Europe; a lamentable detail of whose divisions and distresses on that very account, makes up the main of their ecclesiastical story\*.

And

\* Videbat Christianum orbem ob varias de religione opiniones in partes misere scissum et discerptum; animas odio mutuo acerbatos, ecclesie unitatem conculcatam, charitatem extinctam: nec ullum malis hisce adhiberi posse remedium, fonte et scaturigine eorum non sublata.

Omnium



And here I cannot well avoid remarking, that all kinds of engagements declarative of our full and final persuasion in matters of faith, how reputable so ever

Omnium autem malorum fontemprehendit, quod homines, simplicitate sacrae Scripturae derelicta, verba formulasque loquendi Spiritui sancto ignotas excogitaverant, iisque tanquam *ΣΕΠΤΗΝΕΥΣΟΙΣ* conscientias aliorum alligârunt, a quibus recedere esset nefas; Hæ tesserae et *ΧΡΙΤΗΡΑΣ* fuerunt, ex quibus orthodoxi ab hæreticis dignoscerentur; nec ulli ad eadem sacra nisi formularum harum subscriptione admissi: Quod aliis jugum intolerandum videtur, qui sacram Scripturam unicam fidei regulam agnoscetes, conscientias suas humanis verbi divini interpretationibus, perinde atque verbo ipso, adstringi indignissime serunt. Hinc dum illi pro verborum a se excogitatorum auctoritate, hi pro sua libertate stant, misera fit ecclesiae ruptura.

Unicum huic malo remedium est, omnibus huiusmodi humanis formulis rejectis ad sacrae Scripturae simplicitatem reverti, et, ad apostolorum exemplar, loqui prout Spiritus sanctus nobis dedit eloqui.

Compendiosissima id obtinendi via est, formularum harum et phrasium multiplices defectus et incommoda ostendere, iisque malum cui tollendo excogitantur, non sanari, sed exasperari. *Limborch* Præf. ad *Curcell.* Op. Calc. Add *Limb.* Theol. Christ. C. ult. fin. et *Curcell.* Præf. ad *Episcopii* Op.

ever they may have long been in most Churches, yet are wholly founded upon principles directly opposite to those above-mentioned; and rely upon the following supposition, *viz.* that a Teacher of the Gospel has a power so far to abridge his *christian liberty*, as to *entangle* himself with new *yokes*, or tie himself up by stipulations from impartially examining the

‘ Ecclesiastical history will shew us one evil, than which none began sooner, or stretched itself farther, or hath more disturbed and distressed the Christian world in all ages; and that evil is, The imposing unreasonable terms of communion, and requiring Christians to profess doctrines not propounded in scriptural words, but enforced as consequences from passages of Scripture; which one may call systems of *consequential divinity*.—I could propose a long list of questions relating to critical, metaphysical, speculative divinity, which happily are left at large, and not converted into articles of faith. And what is the consequence? The consequence is, that many of the learned never think at all about them; that they who have considered them are of divers opinions; that inquisitive men have disputed about them; and that peevish men have abused one another about them: but no schism hath been caused, nor hath the peace of the Church or the State been disturbed by them.’ *Jortin*, Second Charge. Vol. VII. p. 401—2. Comp. *Chandler* *Introductio. to Limb. Hist. Inquis.* §. 3. No. vi. &c.

the Word of God, and with equal impartiality explaining it agreeably to such examination, in all points, and at all seasons, to the very best of his judgment, and the then measure of his understanding. Which judgment or understanding if it is, as, with the generality of thinking men, it will always be, in a progressive state ; ought it not to be kept always open and unbiaſſed ? Should not we eſteem it our chief duty at all events to ſecure that *ſingleneſs of eye*, which is a qualification abſolutely neceſſary for any fair enquiry ; and which muſt include an unalienable Property, an indefeafible Right inſeparable from the allegiance which belongs to Chriſt our only Lord and *Maſter* ; to the prefer- vation of which we ſhould conſider ourſelves as lying under a perpetual obligation, antecedent to all compacts, promiſes or oaths, made in any wiſe to the contrary, and indiſpenſable by them ?

And ſeeing the ſame word of God is owned to be an adequate rule, amply ſufficient for eternal ſalvation, and our  
 I  
 only

only safe guide to it; we ought surely to be content with this rule, and leave every doctrine in exactly the same degree of precision, under which it was there originally delivered\*. We should beware of having

\* But it must again to our sorrow be confessed, that many ecclesiastical societies were so far from being content with the plain, easy, natural plan of their primitive institution, that they could not rest till they had got some artificial system, or set of doctrines, as a badge to distinguish them from some other societies of their fellow Christians, or to make party distinctions among themselves; though such particular doctrines are not to be found in their original standard, without *wresting* it:—which may be done many ways, even opposite to each other: v. g. either first, by extending and enlarging; or secondly, by cramping and confining it.

1. By taking some of its terms in a *general, absolute* sense, as including the *whole nature*, essence, substance, &c. of an incomprehensible Being, where such Being is only set forth *relatively*, i. e. so far as he respects *us*, or as may concern our interest in and duty to him; or,

2. By diving into the particular *modus* of a thing, which is only laid down in general words; though these be sufficient to convey to us as clear and complete ideas of the Doctrines contained in them, as probably we are capable of receiving, and making a right use of, in our present state,

By



having any *other Gospel preached unto us*, or any other articles propounded to us *for Gospel\**: we neither should ourselves attempt to fix, nor, so far as in us lieth, suffer others to fix any standards, or criterions of faith separate from this gospel, as containing some authentic expositions of it; and these of such authority, that the text itself must bend to them upon occasion, and be determined by them, as they are proved again by that in a circle.

Such a proceeding constitutes the worst part of the whole Popish system, and easily

By these means men are apt to involve themselves in endless difficulties, and often labour to entail the same on all succeeding generations.

Instances of this common conduct are too obvious to need naming.

\* Vid. *Locke on Gal. i. 7, 8, 9.* Θαυμάζω οτι πτω ταχως μετατιθεσθε εις ιτερον Ευαγγελιον. Ο ουκ εστιν αλλο ει μη τινες εισιν οι ταρασσοντες υμας.—*I marvel ye are so soon removed unto another gospel: which is not owing to any thing else, but only this, that ye are troubled by a certain sort of men, who would overturn the Gospel of Christ by making other things necessary*

easily makes way for all the rest: and perhaps answers more exactly than some may imagine to St. Paul's charge of *corrupting the word of God, and handling it deceitfully.*

Against all such dangerous practices this Apostle has repeatedly forewarned us \*: and well were it for us would we carefully attend to his admonition; being ever diligent in cultivating and improving our knowledge of the Scriptures in their true spirit, and original purity; ever willing to impart the fruits of such proficiency to our brethren, as occasion may be offered.

This is what our own church solemnly requires of us, [how consistently with some other requisitions is here little to the purpose;] to the same we with equal solemnity pledge ourselves, at our entrance on the ministry: which formal  
decla-

necessary beside those which are evidently contained in it.

So early did this spirit of imposing, stiled *the mystery of iniquity*, begin to work!

\* Ου καπηλευοντες — μηδε δολαντες τον λογον.  
2 Cor. ii. 17. iv. 2.

declaration indeed properly reminds us of, and publickly repeats, but cannot in strictness either create or alter the obligation; since our original duty to the supreme Governor must remain in full force, how seldom soever we are induced to recognize it, or how much soever we may risk it by submitting to injunctions from subordinate governors; which may vary from or prove repugnant to it, as shall suit the taste and temper of those who are pleased to usurp his legislative authority.

From what has been observ'd, there appears sufficient reason to conclude, that any implicit submission to any such authority, is hardly consistent with that entire obedience which is due to the sole Author of salvation; that strict attention which ever should be paid to the terms thereof prescribed by himself, and plainly set forth in his holy word; by which word we know, all of us are to be *judged at the last day*; and which is left with us to be carefully applied in every exigence to our consciences, and interpreted [all possible

possible helps being used for that purpose] in the last resort, by our own reason, and *not that of another*: for the upright use whereof, as abovesaid, and for that alone, we are properly accountable, whatever be the result of such enquiries and interpretations\*.

With regard to the right of requiring Subscription deduced from the nature of a *society*, as such, which writers on that side generally set out with; it rests entirely on this argument or assertion, *viz.* that the church, like other societies, has a power to prescribe its own terms of admittance,

\* \* The literal, plain and uncontrovertible meaning of Scripture, without any addition or supply by way of interpretation, is that alone which we are bound to accept.—I take not this to be any particular conceit of mine, but that unto which our church stands necessarily bound. When we receded from the church of *Rome*, one motive was, because she added unto Scripture her Glosses, and canonical, to supply what the plain Text of Scripture did not yield. If in place of others, we set up our own Glosses, thus to do were nothing else but to pull down *Baal*, and set up an *Ephod*; to run round and meet the church of *Rome* again in the same point, in which at first we left her. *J. Hales, Gold. Rem. p. 19.*



mittance, and annex what conditions it pleases to the privileges it confers; and so long as no man is compelled to subscribe, say they, but left at liberty either to accept the emoluments offered, upon the terms they are offered, or to decline them both; there can be no reason to complain of hardship.

But this capital argument may perhaps on examination appear inapplicable to the present case.

For if the society is something more than a mere human establishment, or voluntary combination of men, and derives its constitution from some higher authority; the terms of admittance into such society, may be fixed by the very authority that constituted the society itself, and consequently placed out of the power of any bye-law, or subsequent regulation or restraint. In this view, the matter seems to have been considered originally. *Acts viii. 36. And the Eunuch said, See here is water, what doth binder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou*  
D 2 *mayest.*

*mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

How different is this short Creed from the long and crowded Confessions of later ages!

*Ibid. xi. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like Gift, as he did unto us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God? Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? ib. x. 47. Comp. Acts xv. 19, &c. Where in the very first and most orthodox council, St. James gives his judgment against troubling those with impositions, who from among the Gentiles had been turned to God, and on such conversion been favoured with extraordinary Gifts.*

In these and the like passages, does there appear any right of arbitrary exclusion? Is it not clear, on the contrary, that the Apostles and Elders esteemed themselves bound to receive all Converts on a general profession of their faith in Christ, and their complying with the terms

terms of his Gospel ; and were no more at liberty to shut them out, than to force them in ; or authorised to lay upon them any other *burden*, beside a few *necessary* things, *i. e.* necessary for the then state and circumstances of these converts, of which necessity the imposers, or rather continuers, of such burden were very competent judges ?

Farther ; If the acts of this same society often draw after them consequences relative to another, wherein it has no right to interfere ; and very nearly affect the civil property of individuals, over which it has no jurisdiction ; should it not be extremely cautious in framing such determinations, as are attended with these consequences ?

Again : Do not all such particular, minute regulations properly belong to *Temporals*, whereof the respective governors in each community have the disposal ? and should they with equal strictness and precision take place in *Spirituals*, which cannot in like manner be dispensed by  
these

these governors, or become subject to their cognisance ?

As to the allegation, that there can be no room to complain of hardship, where there is no compulsion ; though it were allowed, that men are not properly *compelled* to declare their assent to what they cannot believe ; yet it must also be allowed, that they are oftentimes violently *tempted* to it : and it is hard to say, how either church or state can find its account in hazarding as well the peace, as probity of its members, by leading them into all the labyrinths of a loose, and a perfidious casuistry ; more especially when it is considered, that conscience once strained, seldom contracts again to its first dimensions \*.

Nor

\* Is not St. Paul's admonition in a like case equally applicable to the present ?—1 Cor. viii. 9. *Take heed lest by any means this Liberty [or as it is in the margin, Power] of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ,* ver. 12. To the same purpose is his whole 14th chapter to the *Romans*, where the same



Nor does any farther security seem requisite in ecclesiastical establishments, than that of public acquiescence under their decisions, as so many known laws of the land, to which we submit, whatever may be our private sentiments concerning their utility : nor does it seem reasonable, that any farther Test be imposed upon a minister in any church, than his promise of compliance with, or, as the act of uniformity expresses it, *using* the liturgy, rites and offices of that church in which he is to minister. This one would think sufficient for any valuable purpose, without an express profession of such minister's present belief

con-

good advice is repeatedly inculcated upon that church, and cannot be too strongly recommended to our attention. *Let us not therefore judge one another any more. But judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way,* ver. 13. Does not what the same Apostle says of *uncleanness* hold equally good of *untruth* ? There may be nothing in all the points enjoined untrue *in itself* ; but to him that *esteemeth* any thing to be untrue, *to him*, in all moral construction, *it is* untrue.

concerning each particular doctrine comprehended in them, or which is still more extraordinary, a promise from him to persist in the same belief all his lifetime \*.

This assurance of conforming to the rules and constitutions of his church, every one may honestly give, and adhere to, so long as upon full examination he continues satisfied, that there is nothing enjoined by the said church, manifestly repugnant to that supreme rule, whereunto both he and it ought ever to remain conformable,

And

\* In the church of *Scotland*, the usual form of subscription binds all intrants into the ministry, and all elders in their supreme judicatory, ‘ to assent to every proposition in the *Westminster Confession*, as being founded in the holy Scripture, and promise to adhere to the said persuasion to their life’s end.’ Address to the church of *Scotland*, p. 10. 1739.

I am informed, that of late there have been instances of a Subscription admitted with particular exceptions.

In the university of *Dublin* they have no subscription at all, by the direction of Archbishop *Laud* himself, as is supposed, when he was changing some of his opinions.

And though some well-meaning people may entertain such high notions of ecclesiastical power, and its relation to the state, as to be fond of drawing consequences from one of these establishments to the other; or politicians may find their account in artfully confounding them; yet surely these are in themselves very distinct things, and ought to be kept as clear from each other as is possible; so that neither of them be prostituted to corrupt views.

The terms of our communion in this life, ought neither to be stretched beyond those of our common salvation in the next; nor other laws of Christian fellowship introduced, beside those which the great Author and *Finisher of our Faith* hath seen fit to appoint for the government of his church throughout all ages.

Whereas it is justly apprehended, that several bye points and bye laws in many a church, that boasts of its great purity and moderation, will hardly bear this test; being so foreign to the real essence of a Christian society, as to afford little

E ground

ground for their having been enacted at all; much less, enforced with *pains and penalties*, and surrounded with such a train of *wholesome severities*, as are productive of nothing but misery and confusion;—such as tend equally to distress men in their circumstances, and disturb their peace of mind;—to impair their fortunes—injure their prospects—blast their reputations; and where full scope is given to them, terminate in bodily inflictions: And all this, out of the purest and most pious concern for the souls of those misled men; or rather [since the promoters of all this must know, that it is not the way to enlighten and convert such] the souls of some others, whose safety is supposed to depend upon the like measures.

The old and constant plea for every work of violence, every kind and degree of persecution, in religious matters!

'Tis farther observable, that in such *minutiæ* as compose a great part of the *Corpus et syntagma Confessionum*, there neither is, nor ever was any tolerable  
excuse



excuse for obliging all the members of their respective churches to an exact uniformity of opinion; were such a thing indeed possible: nor, if these *curious points* should be deemed of more importance, than has yet been discovered; and those who impose them were the sole judges of this importance, [a thing always taken for granted by themselves, but perhaps not so easily proved] even then could they be justified in applying such means for the attainment of any end, in how favourable a light soever it might appear to the generality of their adherents, or however flattering to themselves; how much soever it might promise to advance any secular interest, or establish any pretensions to superior sanctimony; and thereby enable such disciples of the *meek and lowly Jesus*, to *lord it over God's heritage*, instead of being *examples to the flock*; to have *dominion over their faith*, rather than be *helpers of their joy*.

We now indeed profess other sentiments and resolutions. We are willing

to allow those who have the misfortune of dissenting from us, to think freely for themselves; and disown the least intention to deprive them of this freedom: nay, rather extol that clemency, which ceases to push on a rigorous execution of the severe statutes made against them in the days of our fathers, saying, *if we had lived in those days*, we would not have carried matters with so high a hand.

Yet, alas! do not even *we* sometimes betray an inclination to keep such inhuman laws still hanging over their heads, and thereby hold the unhappy subjects of them under a hank upon occasion, and have them always at our mercy?

This may appear to some a more decent and refined piece of political wisdom, which answers all ends more effectually, than either countenancing, or complying with, any attempt to enforce such statutes by a too odious and invidious prosecution. Whereas, in truth, these same penal laws, while they subsist, give so great encouragement to informers, that it is often out of our power to prevent the  
exc-

execution of them, were we never so well disposed to do it: and it may at length perhaps merit our consideration, whether an absolute denial of relief to these our protestant brethren, on their repeated *supplications* (who best know *their own sore, and their own grief*) must not prove an ill return for all the labours which many of them have successfully bestowed upon the common cause of Christianity and Protestantism; labours, which if every liberal writer or reader were as ready to reward, as he is to adopt, would have procured them a different treatment from that of being exposed to confiscations, and imprisonment.

We are told indeed, that it is sometimes better and safer to let a law drop by disuse, than to abolish it by a formal repeal.

But no example of this is given; and it is so far from being the general sense of our Legislature, that hardly a session is suffered to pass without expunging from their statute books some or other of these *antiquated ordinances*. And we may well presume they would have thought

thought it no good objection to a repeal of the laws against *witches* or *gyppies*, that it had been many years since one of that sort of criminals suffered under such laws.

With respect to an entire, complete Toleration, the matter of fact seems to be no other than this: In countries where most liberty is allowed, we find the most knowledge of Christianity; and by consequence, most room to expect the purest profession of it. To what else can be ascribed the manifest superiority, which we so justly boast over our Popish neighbours? And should not we, on any other occasion in the world, think of extending an expedient, which, so far as it has hitherto been tried, ever has succeeded happily?

We are sometimes indeed terrified with the mischievous consequences that might arise, if people were suffered to declare their own religions, without subscribing to what some please to call the Fundamentals of Christianity: and yet what mischiefs have arisen from permitting even the *Jews* to exercise  
 I                      their



their religion, without any such subscription \*?

But how agreeable soever such a Toleration may appear to all sound policy, as well as to the first principles of our benevolent religion; it is much to be doubted, whether a considerable majority do not still continue tenacious of quite different maxims, either from some such apprehension as that abovementioned; or from some secret love of spiritual domination, which still holds possession of their hearts; and which is indeed ever presenting itself, under a variety of specious titles and appearances :

Though

\* I remember, indeed, a short theological dispute was once attempted to be raised against *naturalizing* them, from that ingenious topic the great danger of *defeating prophecies*. It was first started in a small performance, said to be done by one of the Common Council of *London*; which probably gave the original cue to some persons, of greater eminence, for sounding an alarm. This piece was wrote with much appearance of simplicity, and had a suitable text set before it: *These men being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city*.—This is not the only instance where the *church's danger* has been dragged into a question purely political, and the *odium theologicum* let loose to serve a turn.

Though it be hardly now admitted as  
 A POWER TO RULE THE CONSCIENCES  
 OF MEN; in which very form this favourite doctrine was long tacked, awkwardly enough, to the Bible itself, and appears there still in several editions\*: Yet it comes in for its claim of *submission*, as including some kind of *coercive jurisdiction*, some branch of a certain *power of the keys*;—as an *authority of order*, &c. &c. whatever may be comprehended under such more plausible terms.

But how fond soever some Clergymen may be of Clerical Authority, the best of their predecessors, the Apostles, appeared to have small concern about it.

When a warm controversy arose in the church of *Rome*, concerning a distinction of days, and meats, and drinks; of equal importance with many, that have subsisted since; we do not find *St. Paul*,  
 with

\* Vid. *Contents* of the latter part of Psalm cxlix. Ed. Bill, 4to, 1702. *Basket*, 4to, 1733. Do. fol. 1739. Though I must do both our Universities the justice to remark, that in their late editions, this is tolerably qualified.

with the officiousness of later church governors, proceeding to frame an Article upon this question; but on the contrary, leaving each person to the *persuasion of his own mind*; and neither decreeing nor recommending any other practice or profession relative to it, beside that of charity and mutual forbearance\*.

What an engine for other purposes has the Commission, which Christ is supposed to have given St. *Peter* †, been in other hands! And yet *Peter* himself never once appealed to it, nor claimed any kind of pre-eminence from it. Nay, it is somewhat remarkable that *Mark*, who is said to have written under *Peter's* own inspection, has omitted the very mention of this commission, though he has preserved the history which led to it ‡: so little anxious was the Apostle, or his primitive Disciple, to display any such token of superiority!

And how much greater reason have we at this day, to abandon all such claims

F under

\* *Rom.* xiv. Comp. *1 Cor.* viii.

† *Matth.* xvi. 18.

‡ *Mark* viii. 29.

under every denomination? We have seen the effects of them early and late, abroad and at home: each period of church history yielding most abundant evidence, that all such *Fortifications*, as they are usually stiled, when once mounted with a proper train of artillery, and that properly played off, instead of serving to annoy the enemy, are but too apt to hurt our friends.

Such doctrinal Formularies exclude none, but conscientious men, from any particular communion; they create no difficulty to others, who subscribe them as things of course; and in the like circumstances, will subscribe any thing.

Neither can these Tests hinder the most cautious and inoffensive persons from delivering their real sentiments on any subject, which they judge to be of importance; and where they must think themselves obliged to bear their testimony, notwithstanding that the opposite side happens to have been decreed with all solemnity.

Nor



Nor in fact, does there now appear a less variety of opinions, though a less safe one, among thinking persons, where any competent degree of liberty remains, than in all probability there would have been, if no such decrees ever had existed.

Nay, how could any thing, do we imagine, but enjoining the belief, and annexing emoluments to the profession of sundry opinions, have ever given importance to them, or caused contests, and created animosities about them ?

Our Church at first proceeded on the most extensive plan, of accommodating matters with her several disputants ; by the help of general, comprehensive terms, trying to *take in* such as might hold different opinions on the various questions in debate.

But this soothing project proved of little avail, and of as small continuance. She is indeed complimented for the Device, by one in high authority ; who *comforts* himself with a persuasion, that by this means *all clergymen within the realm most willingly subscribed* ; whence he

proceeds to *argue*, in the same comfortable way, that they *all agreed in the usual meaning of the said articles*; and that men of all sorts took the same articles to be for them, even in those curious points where the then differences lay: while at the very same time, and by the very same authority \*, we see the intention of these articles defined in a different manner; and declared to be, not for *the covering and cloking*, but for *avoiding diversities of opinions*, and *establishing consent touching true religion*; and are commanded to receive them in the strict, *literal*, and *grammatical sense*, and not to draw them aside any way; i. e. by any construction, which might render them conformable to more approved methods of interpreting the Bible: Though it sometimes proves more difficult to reduce their terms to such conformity, than to extract the plain sense of Scripture from itself, by comparing the several passages together, on any

\* Concerning both the authority and sense of this famous declaration, see *Mosheim*, Eccl. Hist. Vol. IV. Eng. note m. p. 519.

any subject where it has given an express decision; which indeed seldom happens to be the case, in such points as are at present under consideration.

And since neither any passage of Scripture, nor consequently any good exposition of it, can have more than *one meaning*; if in supporting any doctrine deduced from such passage, we are forced to have recourse to what is called a *Latitude of Interpretation*, i. e. no interpretation at all:—if we be driven to such wretched shifts, in order to get rid of the numerous perplexities which surround these knotty points, and make it so very difficult an attempt to unravel them:—Why cannot we at length learn prudence enough to give them up, and let them and us rest in peace?

In truth, whatever be the pretence, the common aim of church governours, at least the consequence, of demanding universal assent to articles of Faith, is not so much to fix any clear, determinate sense on certain passages of Scripture, as to *add* something, to deduce and *infer* certain

certain points of doctrine beyond what Scripture has declared, or we the vulgar, can find there; hereby fairly intimating our inability to comprehend the thing ourselves, and teaching us to acquiesce in these original determinations rather than attempt it; to give credit to those wise and learned persons, who have taken so much pains, once for all, in removing all difficulties from us, in order both to save us the trouble, and secure us from the danger of encountering them.

Or perhaps this whole plan may have been no more than a *Fashion* with many framers of modern ecclesiastical constitutions, formed merely in imitation of other old constitutions, and following that general practice, to the contemplation whereof they had so long been habituated, that they did not well know how to go on without it:—But be this as it may.

Let us next proceed to some *Pleas* offered in support of the practice.

One of these, drawn from the sacred Writings being capable of such a variety



of senses, that men of widely different persuasions shelter themselves under the same forms of expression; is answered, in the first place, by a query, Whether the Scriptures are in reality so differently interpreted, in points of real consequence; or whether taking this for granted, and making ourselves the sole judges of that consequence, be not begging the whole question?

Secondly: If some few passages be capable of divers interpretations, they are not more so than other ancient writings must be, to persons unacquainted with the genius of the language, the notions, customs, &c. of those times wherein they were written: nay, than these interpretations themselves will be, when grown *ancient*, on the very same account.

Nor does the present method of establishing authentic expositions mend the matter; but rather make it worse, and add a new burden; since not only these Expositions will at length become equally difficult to be expounded, and adjusted

to

to the Text, as observed already; but are moreover attended with many other ill effects, as will appear more fully hereafter.

Another common plea of the same kind, is, that all sorts of *pestilent heresies* might be taught in public, if no such restraint as this were laid upon the Teachers.

To which it may briefly be replied :

Let those, who are entrusted with the power of admitting persons to be Teachers, carefully enquire into their qualifications for that purpose; and according to the best of their judgments, reject such persons as they find either grossly ignorant of the great principles of religion, or whom they have just reason to suspect of a determined resolution to condemn them, and disgrace their calling. But let such examination into the characters of candidates for Holy Orders be directed to their general sufficiency in Learning, and regularity of Manners, rather than become an inquisition into their private sentiments, or any particular opinions  
which

which they have hitherto kept private, and may very reasonably wish to do so, till they see cause to the contrary.

And let such as enter on this sacred Office, be ready, in pursuance of the promise which they then make, *with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away*, [i. e. by argument and exhortation] *all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word*: to this end, let the Church, if she thinks fit, supply them with proper *Comments* on it, or *Homilies* properly adapted to *their own times*; [both which were intended by those excellent persons, who procured the last Royal Commission for a Review \*, though perhaps they are

G

not

\* What reason have we to lament the fate of this Commission under which these great and good men had proceeded so far as to revise most of our Liturgy, and would have completed that glorious work, had they not been overpower'd by an opposite Faction, which soon put an end to all such designs; nor have any since had the heart to undertake, few seem desirous of promoting such a good work, though it must now become much more expedient from the mere length of time that has intervened, and more easy to be accomplished from the increase of Bibli-

cal

not now so necessary ;] together with a variety of occasional *Offices*, [which was then likewise in all probability designed, and would be still highly useful ;] and, if you please, with *Articles of Religion* also, by way of more compendious instruction, or as *Helps* and directions for the more effectual discharge of their ministry \*. But let her not convert what is thus provided for the *edification* of her sons, into a snare for their *destruction*, by forcing them to maintain, and in effect swear to, the rectitude and certainty of every thing that she delivers : which grand mistake seems to have been the *πρωτον ψευδος*, that has occasioned all the mischief in these cases.

Let not matters of *doubtful disputation*, which are endless ; nor arbitrary, unscriptural decisions, which too commonly encroach

cal knowledge, and other concurrent advantages, since that period ; and though the necessity for such an undertaking be every day more and more apparent !

\* This *Mosheim* represents to be the case precisely with the *Arminian* Confession, Eccl. Hist. c. 3. § 12, 13.



encroach upon the *liberty of prophesying*, be made a Test of each person's qualification for the ministry; an indispensable condition of his either being admitted to, or continuing in it.

Nor need we go about to detect and abjure, or embarrass ourselves with entering a particular caveat against all those *wicked errors*, which have been advanced in opposition to the acknowledged rule of our faith; [that method only tending, as was above intimated, to keep alive all such absurdities, and perpetuate them;] since according to the old maxim, *Rectum index sui et obliqui*; on the very supposition of their being such, they must be sufficiently distinguishable; [else how come we by a sufficient authority to condemn them?] and *those who cause divisions and offences*, may be easily marked and avoided, according to the Apostle's exhortation \*: though we may not so readily deliver such over to Satan, for want of the same extraordinary and apostolical gifts.

G 2

Nor

\* *Rom. xvi. 17.*

Nor does any one faction, in any religious community, appear to give more just *offence*, and need more to be *marked* accordingly, than those who hold such principles of intolerance, as are evidently inconsistent with the natural rights and liberties of all mankind.

Why may not every *Preacher* be left in the same situation with a *Publisher*? liable to censure for impieties when uttered by him; but not bound beforehand to such a clog of *Precautions*, as burden thousands for one that there is occasion to restrain; and which may perhaps not improperly be termed a continuation of the old *Provisors*, but inverted, and for a much worse purpose; since those were only framed, in order to the more convenient seizing of preferments when fairly vacant; these are calculated either to make a distressful vacancy of some, that may have been very honestly obtained; or to preclude the attainment of others, by means no less premature.

In short, neither does any church discipline, built upon principles purely Christian, require such expedients; nor do the holy Scriptures ever enjoin, or warrant them; nor does the Bible itself want an established *fence* to guard, or authoritative comment to expound it: but men are always wanting some means or other to extend its bounds, or as they modestly presume, improve upon it. They long to introduce some parts of their own system, [by which they have ever been accustomed to interpret it;] where they conclude, that the sacred Writers have left matters short, or not expressed them with that propriety and perspicuity which *might be wished*; or not adapted themselves to subjects in vogue since their times.

Such men are constantly in danger of departing from their rule, so far as they set up another in any degree subsidiary to it; or pay the same implicit obedience to human authorities, as is due to that alone; or go one step farther than  
 3 that

that has gone in every point which it decides.

Nor can any plan be produced as a *Center of Union* \*, or ground of *Unity in Opinion*;—or Line drawn to fix the *Limits* of a Christian society;—or *other foundation laid by any man* for its stability :—nor ought other bars to be set for the restraint of Catholic communion, beside those already set by that infallible Guide, which is alone able to conduct us to *the mark and prize of our high calling; to make us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works* †.

It would be less necessary to repeat these trite and obvious reflections, were it

\* For the like purpose of *keeping men together*, and as a monument, or *mark*, [Gen. xi. 4. Comp. Worthington, B. L. § 8. and Goguet, Orig. of Laws, &c. Introd. p. 2\*.] to preserve and perpetuate that kind of union among them, was the tower of *Babel* erected by the great political architects of those times: and perhaps it will be thought worth observing, that a like fate, i. e. *Confusion*, has attended some other structures raised by their successors in the same art, and for the very same end.

† 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17.



it not equally obvious to remark the notorious inconsistency, which has at all times prevailed concerning them: v. g. This perfect sufficiency of holy Scripture, most Churches are willing enough to allow in words, but in fact as constantly deny it; and have recourse to Forms of their own devising to supply [for they can mean nothing else but supplying] the defects of it; resolved to become *wise above what is there written*, and to seek out for themselves better ways of writing, than those which *seemed good to the Holy Ghost*.

This whole attempt therefore to settle Scripture doctrines, or rather substitute others in their room, through unscriptural interpretations, is by some deemed unnecessary; by others impious.

And surely such a conduct will amount to something very different from that of establishing *Forms of Prayer*, and public *Offices*, or of decreeing *Rites and Ceremonies*; which Scripture has left at large, under that general Canon of *Decency and Order* \*.

These

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

These seem to be proper subjects of a special determination, to prevent divisions and confusion in Divine Worship; and as the notions of mankind concerning most of them, vary in various times and places; and none in particular are esteemed of absolute necessity to salvation:—these may very safely be determined by the respective governors in each country, [which, one would think, must afford ground enough to support the best Establishment;] though the fewer such are, and the more suited to the native simplicity, and true genius of Christianity, the safer still and the better.

But if men will go farther than this, and assume the same power in selecting and enacting certain doctrines, as prime articles of *Faith*; it behoves them carefully to guard against all errors and abuses, by keeping as strictly as is possible to the very words of Scripture\*.

Nor

\* ‘ In matters of Revelation I think it not only safest, but our Duty, as far as any one delivers it for Revelation, to keep close to the words of Scripture,

Nor let it here be said, that for the same reason, none but Scripture language should be used in *preaching*—since the two cases are widely different: the one peremptorily decides matters for us, and binds them upon us; the other purposes only to instruct and assist us in the true sense and right use of God's holy word; by explaining and enforcing it according to modern ideas, and the usual modes of reasoning in our part of the world; by *rightly dividing* it, and applying proper portions of it to the several exigencies of a congregation; for the soundness, pertinence, and propriety whereof, every Preacher is well understood to be answerable; and therefore must be allowed to make use of such terms, as he finds best suited to his purpose. Nor is there now-a-days a Divine authority pretended to, in any particular instance of discharging this important duty.

H So  
 ture, unless he will assume to himself the authority of one inspired, or make himself wiser than the Holy Spirit himself.' *Locke on Identity.* Answ. to Bishop of *Worcester.*

So little reason can there be for drawing a parallel between these two, either as to the mode and end of their institution, or in point of use and edification.

Our Church repeatedly affirms, that the *holy Scriptures* contain *all doctrines required of necessity for eternal salvation*; and as these were originally delivered to the very lowest of the people, and in the most popular language, the substance of them will at all times be sufficiently intelligible; nor can any set of Propositions on any Fundamentals of the Christian Faith, [which last perhaps will appear on examination, to be much fewer than are generally imagined,] be expressed more clearly and distinctly, than is there done to our hands, over and over; due allowance being made for the foresaid difference between the then popular modes of speaking and our own. Nor can we justly claim the power of calling any man to account for his sentiments on any subject not thus ascertained.



In other *curious points*, which have at all times constituted the bulk of learned Controversy, if we find persons fixing wrong senses, as we think, on any parts of Scripture; that can hardly give us a right of pinning it down for them by a particular one of our own, how just and reasonable soever we may apprehend it to be; since none of us openly pretend to infallibility; though we are too often tempted to behave as if we had it, and too apt to affect something really equivalent to it.

It is this fatal scheme of making *ours* the measure of every other man's *Faith*, and obtruding it upon him, instead of *having it to ourselves before God*; which above all things tendeth, and will always tend, to increase the growth of infidelity amongst us;—To create a careless disregard, or a fastidious contempt of all religion in some persons—with a severe censure of, and a strong renitency against this abhorred practice of enforcing whatever may be taken for it, in others; who seem determined thoroughly to sift

our Constitution : And it is evident, that by the increase of general knowledge, and a no less general taste for liberty, numbers become equally qualified and disposed to do so : While others yet appear not to be duly sensible, under what difficulties we of the Establishment must lie, in such a confused state of things, as is necessarily produced by the want of those timely revivals, and gradual reformatations, which might enable it to keep pace with each improvement in every branch of science round about us.

Were some persons sufficiently apprized of this, they would not surely be so forward to suspect us of *hypocrisy* and *prevarication*, while we esteem ourselves bound to keep up all these forms, till relieved by proper authority : nor impute it wholly to our private interest, when we ministerially comply with what we are not able to remove ; and patiently remain in posts, however invidiously misrepresented, where it is conceived that we may do more good, and perform a more acceptable service to our  
com-

common Master; by continuing to labour on in his waste vineyard, and wait his own time for opportunities of using our little influence [hereby prevented from growing still less] towards pruning a few wild branches in it, and rooting out some of the rankest weeds; rather than despond immediately on every cause of offence, that must occur to us; or peevishly revolt at each injurious reproach, that will be cast upon us \*. If

our

\* 'It is none of the terms of communion in our Church, as I know of, that we shall think it in every respect perfect, that nothing is wanting to make it complete either in its Government, Discipline, or Worship. Nor is it contrary to the principles of *honesty* and *sincerity* for any one to minister or communicate in a Church, though he think something or other in it may be made better, and more adapted to the ends of religion, and the interests of Christianity. Almighty God, though without all doubt he would have his Church as perfect in all respects as possible, yet without doubt also he would not have us upon every defect we imagine to be in it, withdraw ourselves from the communion of it; because at this rate we must not communicate at all, but live separately from all the Churches in the world.'—*Hoadly's Reasonableness of Conformity,*

our first Reformers had quitted their stations in the Church, instead of using all their painful endeavours to amend it;

we

mity. Works, Vol. I. p. 260. That to separate from the Church is not a likely way of making it more perfect, is shewn at large by the same truly candid and judicious writer, who has indeed exhausted the whole subject, and whose irrefragable arguments in favour of private judgment, one might well think, should have settled all the doubts and difficulties on that head, so far as argument is able to settle them, and rendered it unnecessary for the same work to be done over again, so long as ever the *Bangorian Controversy* is remembered.

To proceed with him on a question somewhat more delicate, but not less seasonable at present. 'It is true, that upon the supposition that the Church may be made more perfect, nothing will hinder considering men from promoting such attempts as will do it. No unreasonableness or unaccountable behaviour, no aggravations or invectives, no violence or heat, in any who differ from them, ought to have such an effect upon their minds, as to render them unwilling, or indisposed to encourage a farther Reformation; because their failings belong to themselves, and not to the cause in hand, and can make that neither better nor worse. If it be reasonable in itself, it will be so, whoever espouse it, or by what methods soever they attempt it: and the *Perfection* of a Church is a thing of that moment,



we should have little reason either to admire their spirit, or applaud their conduct at this day.

In moment, that nothing ought to divert us from pressing towards it. But then on the other side, would any who seriously desire this *accommodation*, and wish for such concessions, take such methods to procure them as in the ordinary and constant course of things must resist and hinder them? *Ibid.* p. 266.—I may appeal to the *reason* and *experience* of mankind, and to the known movements of human nature, if it be not more likely, by patience and tenderness, by conformity to men in all lawful things, by courtesy and amity, by keeping up a friendship and good correspondence, by calmness and temper, by moderation and candour, to bring them to a yielding disposition and a compliant humour, to incline their affections and their goodwill towards us, and so to dispose them to be ready to make *abatements* and *alterations*, than by *separating* from them as persons unworthy of our *constant communion*, by aggravating and loading their cause with all the evil we can invent, by putting the worst construction upon all their actions, by drawing the people from them, and encouraging their prejudices against them, by setting up other *Forms of Church Government and Worship*, at the widest distance from them. Let me ask any person whether of these two is the most probable method of attaining this end? *Ibid.* p. 270.

In the mean time it must afford no small satisfaction to every sober-minded examiner, that our Church in her excellent Offices of Ordination, and likewise in some parts of her Articles, directs us to the sure rule of God's holy word; and exhorts us to shew *all diligence* in *reading* and *studying* it, and making use of every help to improve and perfect our knowledge in it; and has with great solemnity required us *to instruct the people out of it, and teach nothing as of necessity to salvation, but that which may be proved by it.*

And greater would the satisfaction still have proved, had equal care been taken to preserve that rule inviolate! Happy would it have been for some of her sons, had she, by an uniform adherence to the same rule, steadily renounced, or in a perfectly consistent manner explained that *Authority in Controversies of Faith\**,  
which

\* Some have endeavoured to soften this, by suggesting that it means no more than the *weight* of her judgment or advice in doubtful points; like that  
of

which sets her independent of it, in their apprehension; who may be tempted to enquire, Whether such a pretension, under whatsoever *savings of private judgment*, [a clause which seems here to be quite nugatory,] has not a manifest tendency to disgrace any church in the world, and impair the proper influence of its ministers?

Whether it does not obstruct every fair and impartial search into the true scope of the Divine Oracles; and make men backward even to look into them, for fear of finding there something not quite consistent with what they have already assented to, and must beware of ever varying from at their peril?

Whether it does not tend to stop any farther progress in religious knowledge;

I *can* causing of any other collective body at a consultation in any science or profession.—But is there not a material difference between offering such judgment or advice by way of instruction, or for the clearing up of doubts in any case; and *insisting* on its being followed, or enforcing its *weight* even to the ruin of all those, who cannot in their own consciences comply with such advice?

causing that to be decided once for all, by one particular set of men, and these perhaps in times not the most knowing; which, if at all proper to be decided, were better left to the successive enquiries of several orders and professions, and to the growing wisdom of ages?

Whether it does not manifestly disturb the public tranquillity; and heap up perpetual matter of contention, by advancing some points for essentials in religion, which are very far removed from the foundation of it; and by a warm contest for such, and [as it too generally happens] such alone, misplacing all the merit, and esteem of its professors; and in proportion to the prevalence of that same spirit, deadening their zeal, and discouraging their labours, in every thing *lovely, virtuous, and praise-worthy*; i. e. *good and profitable unto men*?

The case of general indiscriminate imposition, seems not much better with respect to collections of unreformed *Statutes* in our bodies corporate, both *Ecclesiastic* and *Collegiate*; to the observance whereof



whereof young persons are obliged to take an *Oath*, or lose the benefit of such emoluments and education; which must render all these oaths cheap, whilst many of the contents, thus sworn to in the gross, by growing useless, or impracticable, are esteemed scarcely worth a serious examination \*.

Nor

\* Some old framers and imposers of statutes, have been wise enough to insert particular *authors*, to the reading whereof they confined their respective students; and if their successors had been no wiser than to pursue the same plan of education, it would have most effectually put an end to all improvements; and we might have stuck fast in *Aristotle* to this day. Vid. Stat. Ox. Tit. 4. §. 4. 9, 10. Stat. Cant. c. 4. Trin. Coll. ib. c. 9. Prælector *Aristotelem* in docendo philosophiam, alium auctorem præterea neminem, interpretetur.

We cannot expect, that such constitutions should be much more judicious in the article of Divinity.

But yet for the credit of some of our foundations, it ought to be known, that the following truly protestant oath is annexed to their statutes.

Ego N. P. meipsum astringo, et Deo teste promitto ac spondeo, Primo, me veram Christi Religionem omni animo complexurum, Scripturæ auctoritatem hominum judiciis præpositurum, regulam vitæ et summam fidei ex verbo Dei petiturum:

Nor is it any great wonder, if the generality in each case think there is no sufficient reason for debarring themselves from the chief advantages of society, by scrupling to comply with certain Forms, containing such directions, as by length of time and change of circumstances, are become so very unfit for the purposes intended by them, that there is every reason to believe, the Founders and original Imposers themselves, neither meant nor wished, that in such circumstances they should ever continue to be observed.

While again, numbers will suffer all the inconveniences attending each fruitless endeavour to preserve their freedom, and shake off these irksome fetters: whereof we have too frequent, some melancholy examples. And if still greater prejudice do not hence arise, both to the civil and religious interests of many worthy men amongst us, it must be merely accidental; owing more perhaps to the wisdom and  
good

—et contrarias verbo Dei opiniones omni voluntate et mente refutaturum; *Vera consuetis, scripta non scriptis, in Religionis causâ antehabitorum.*

good nature of our governors, or the mild temper of the times, than either to the laws, or spirit of our constitution, as that now stands, and probably will stand a while longer.

May all those, who really wish well to it, be induced to consider ; that if a false, obdurate policy among the *Jewish* rulers, refusing to be reformed when their time was fully come, [and determining rather to crush all those who proposed and urged the proper means of any Reformation,] brought on the dissolution of that degenerate state, which such weak policy was purely calculated to avoid :—Whether a like settled resolution to support the maxims and traditions of our forefathers, and adhere to the same measures for securing some present ease and advantage ; while we reject all those things that belong to our *lasting* peace, how frequently soever they have been pointed out, and pressed upon us ;—whether, I say, this may not hasten the destruction of our *Jerusalem*, when we are equally

2

insen-

insensible of its approach, and unable to withstand it!

However, as I cannot but esteem it to be the duty of every one in this our day, to contribute what lies in his power to the preservation and improvement both of church and state, by embracing all fair opportunities to further, and complete their reformation; I have endeavoured to perform what appeared to be a part of my own duty on the present occasion, and humbly submit the event to the allwise disposal of an over-ruling Providence.

F I N I S.





